

# THE MIDLAND

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## VIGNETTES IN PROSE

By HAZEL HALL

### THE BOY PASSES BY

It was not that he had either a short or a long stride, nor because he toed in or toed out, that made his walk distinctive. It was simply that he was old enough to resemble man and yet so young that there was still a lot of dog about him, that he jiggled when he walked, that his arms were apt to swing at his side like the pendulums of clocks, then tighten up to be as stiff as lead pipe, and that after staring straight ahead of him into some tragedy of distance, his eyes were likely to shoot off over the heads of the passersby, up and over a roof, to particularize foolishly on a little patch of sky.

He went to High School. Every morning he walked to school and every afternoon he walked back again. On Saturdays and Sundays he was always going to some place or else coming home from somewhere. So he spent a lot of time on the street. And because with his manner of going, he dramatized the moment, became instantly a symbol of inchoate humanity, he meant as he walked along, various things to various people. As he passed before them, he was apt to take on the proportions of that particular concern with life which had, more than all others, left upon them an indelible mark.

A woman, who lived next door to him, watched him every morning as he ran down his back steps, passed

under her kitchen window, out to the street and away. And although she appraised him with her eyes and found pleasure in the sight of him, at that very instant he faded from her mind, and in his place another boy passed under the window, out to the street and away. This other boy also moved with the hurry and hunger of youth, but there was nothing of the sleek graces of the dog about him; on the contrary, there clung to him, like a small fog, a suggestion of self-consciousness. If she had ever stopped to think about it, she would have wished that he too could have lost himself in his walk, but of course she had never thought about it any more than she had worried about the color of his eyes and hair, or cared very much because he had a brown mole on the back of his neck. From the day he was born, being marvelously hers, he had been beyond all thought adequate and dear.

So many times she had watched him start off to school as she stood before the sink lifting greasy dishes into clear water or lifting dripping, shining dishes out of water that was growing blue and greasy. So many times she had thought how well he looked in his new overcoat, or that he needed a hair-cut, or that she must not forget to darn his socks. Worries, too, had come to her there, some of them pale, fragmentary things that had slipped with a sticky plate into the clear water to be lifted out again with a gleaming cup, and some so nearly nothing that even as they stirred, they dispersed like the steam moving above the dishpan. But some of them had come back again and again.

Now that he was growing up, how was she going to keep him, how was she going to shield him from hurt, from the girls and women in whom he had suddenly become concerned, and who were gathering on all sides like flame in the vicinity of the moth? The first time the question had come to her they had been walking up from down-town together. A woman, hatted, gowned and

heeled with distinction, had passed them, and as she passed, she looked at the boy and the boy looked back at her with an exchange of glances that the mother felt like an electric shock. The rest of the way home was difficult; she seemed to be walking against a force which pushed upon her like water.

She had been thinking of him as a little boy, and a woman had looked at him,—a woman had looked at him.

After that she wondered a great deal how other mothers felt about this thing. She looked about her, studied her neighbors and friends, and was surprised at their apparent unconcern. It was not that her boy was dearer, was better looking, was surer prey, was it? More likely it was simply that they didn't know anything else to do but keep the thing covered up deep down in themselves. She wondered why they didn't get together and talk it over; sometimes when they were out somewhere for the afternoon, it seemed the conversation was surely verging that way, but just then someone would start in on something like the latest fashions or a new recipe. Then she wanted to ask people, for once she wanted to be honestly melodramatic and ask them: weren't they really more interested—however important the lengths of skirts or the good plain cake that was made with only one egg—weren't they really more interested in how they might fling themselves in a shield between life and the white bodies of their boys?

Alone, she asked herself over and over again: could it be done? Was she going to be able to do it?

The trouble was, she didn't know whether she had done anything or not; she didn't know whether she had helped or had made things worse. That was the worst part of it, not knowing. Sometimes she would get to thinking about it, and wanting so much to think it out, to think, to think, to think it *clear*, that there seemed to be a splitting, a moving-around in her head. Again, her mind

was a black, glittering arrow-thing that was forcing itself all too slowly through very thick space; but it never arrived anywhere; it never did anything but drop. . . . That affair with the milliner's daughter, or that other — maybe her meddling had made things worse. And she had always asked so many questions: Who was that? Where have you been? — It seemed that one question or the other had always been on her lips like a leer. Had it made a difference, or hadn't it? If she could *know*, the rest wouldn't matter so much. For the rest had fitted anachronistically into time, had become so shadowy, blowing about her like so much fine sand whenever she thought of it, that she had almost forgotten to feel sorry about it, sorry for him, sorry for his wife, sorry for herself. But that seemed to make her want to know more than ever why it had been.

The shop on the corner was a butcher shop. Very often the butcher was opening up the shop in the morning when he, who walked as unthinkingly as the wind, strode down the street; very often in the afternoon the butcher glanced up from sawing a bone or wrapping up a cut of meat, to see him swinging past the door again on his way home. Sometimes the butcher shook his head rather sadly, sometimes he frowned, and if he were very tired from standing on his feet all day and bending over purplish, oozy meat, sometimes he wondered what in creation parents were thinking of nowadays, what the parents of this boy were thinking of, to let him waste so much time on the street. Even if they saw fit to keep a big lumbering fellow like him in school when he might be earning his keep and more, you would think they would see to it that he had something to keep him busy in the afternoons. And there was all day Saturday, too. It was too bad; it was a shame, because it was as clear as daylight that the kid wouldn't amount to a row of pins.

If a listener were available, the butcher would expatiate aloud; lacking a listener, it was likely to go on in his head. Everybody knew that a boy raised like that hadn't a chance in the world to get along. Take, for instance, himself. What would he have amounted to if his father hadn't kept his nose down to the grindstone, always seeing to it that he had some good stiff job after school and putting him behind the counter just as soon as he was out of the grade schools? To be sure, he hadn't liked it much, and it did make school almighty hard for him with having no time to study and all, but, then, kids know no more than puppies what's good for them. To be sure, too, he had had all kinds of crazy notions in his head.

At this point, in the case of a listener, he would glance up to give his words emphasis. No one would suspect him of such hifalutin ideas, would they? — but at one time he had it in his head that he was going to be a great surgeon. Yes, sir! He fairly laid awake nights thinking about it. It seemed the thing was in his blood, and for quite a while he never got away from it any more than he got away from his breath. Oh, he was going to do a lot of good, he was, and make a name for himself, too. If ever he had a spare minute, there he was poring over some old medical books he had found, and he had to be good and careful about that, too, for fear his father might find it out; his father wouldn't have stood for any such tommyrot. And didn't it just show how things went? If the old man had bled himself down to his last cent to give him a send-off as a doctor, instead of raking him off the street and standing him up behind the counter, they might all be in a pretty mess now. As it was, they both had put a shoulder to the wheel, until now he owned the business and a lot of land besides and a bunch of kids that were all going to work, you bet you, just as soon as they were out of the eighth grade.

He was apt to wind up with a burst of facetiousness

that went off like a wet firecracker: And it had been only a matter of carving up a different kind of meat, after all.

He seemed so lonely, he seemed so lonely. The man who watched him almost every day from a street-car, drew nothing from the boy but the idea of his own loneliness. He affected him like the whistle of a locomotive heard from the distances of night; he got the feeling of passionate, isolated velocity. Nothing of the art and artlessness of the boy's bearing was lost upon him, nothing of his equivocal immediacy; and his interpretation of these things every day grew more intense.

Brooding upon it, he thought of going to the boy, of drawing him aside to tell him that life was not what he thought it to be, not fellowship, not communal breath and stride; it was the rigorous discipline of loneliness. He would tell him that he walked too much as though he thought the world walked with him; the truth was that he walked as he had come into life and as he would go out of it, alone. He would tell him to slacken up a little and get some sort of a mental panorama of existing conditions around him, that an early, therefore a well-rooted understanding, was the only weapon to combat the inevitable realization. He would tell him that existence was only terrible, and if, as he went along, he found what seemed beautiful and meaningful, it would have the beauty and the meaning of exruciating music, and would serve only to tear his heart to pieces.

Perhaps, if one heard that early enough, it would help

. . . . .  
He never quite worked himself up to the point of jumping off the car to intercept the boy. His personal interest in him dwindled after a while into a curious merging of his own identity with that of the boy. Thus it was that he, instead of the boy, was plunging in and out of these days, striding, breathing, expecting; it was he who was

putting himself in the way of every arrow of hurt; he who was flinging himself down life, as he might fling himself down a street that led to a treacherous bank and a river, insanely believing that he walked among his kind, when in reality he passed among those who each spoke a different language, neither knowing, nor seeing, nor hearing him.

The boy stimulated one woman, like a cup of coffee, into a sense of complacency. Not that she needed the argument of his passing to convince her of the potencies of her race and the age in which she lived; it was only that he fitted, with a little click of rightness, into the mechanism of her unprobed analysis of things.

It was not at all strange that she neglected him in her thought; there were very few occurrences that started motions in her mind. If she did not think of him, at least she spoke of him often, and neither was it strange that she spoke often of him, for she was apt to speak often of anything she had spoken of once. So now and then she would point him out to the children or to the neighbors, and say that he looked like a nice boy and that she guessed he went to High School. And, although that was about all she ever said about him — a few inept words that fluttered over him like gnats and left the idea of him, it would seem, as distant from her mind as though he had never come within radius of her vision — nevertheless the idea, like a cloud of dust, had brushed by her, and unconsciously she was exhilarated and each time was plunged into conversational rushes even more torrential than usual. For the idea was life; it was more: it was that life was good. And if there were any thesis struggling for form behind the mass of her idle, endless, repetitious speech, it was some such one.

Everyone who knew her, knew her to be a woman of many, if not various, words. Everyone knew that she

would likely be saying tomorrow what she had said yesterday of her husband, herself, her children. The neighbors would have surmised, if the occasion had warranted, that she had always been like that. But it was not so. As a girl she had lived behind the screen of a great diffidence.

When she was in her middle teens, her mother had died. Shortly after, her father had married his house-keeper, and the home as she had known it, that had cradled and petted her, was broken up. As she could not get along with any of her relatives, she found herself practically alone in the world — a gawky, sickly girl, living in a little back room in a dark, narrow lodging-house which was all the allowance given her by her father afforded her. At that time she made a few half-hearted attempts to get her head up above the dark and the narrowness of her surroundings, but they were quicksand pulling upon her. And added to the quick dark and narrowness, there were her uncertain health, a brusque manner and dubious state of mind, to work against her. Youth was never anything more for her than a word of five short letters. For days at a time she spoke to no one but street-car conductors, her landlady, or a fellow-lodger — intercourse that was restricted to monosyllables and grunted assents. Her days were spent in doing fancywork with fingers that lost their heaviness to become desperately dexterous, like nervous acrobats; in reading novels and in walking up and down streets to gaze querulously into shop windows, with nothing but the pale glare of window-glass in her eyes.

As she grew older, she became subject to fainting-spells; she developed a disconcerting way of crumpling up in a deathly heap on street corners, as if from sheer angularity and unloveliness. One day a man saw her fall, and, as he was the only person near, it was he who untwisted her arms and legs and was trying to lay her

out straight, when her eyelids quivered open and she fixed a hungry, frightened gaze upon him. He helped her to her feet and walked home with her, feeling her shaky arm pressing heavily on his. In after years she seldom alluded to her early girlhood, but she often told of the day she had fainted and a strange man had picked her up. It was all just like a novel, she would say.

He, too, was alone in the world, and he, too, had a way of going about under the burden of many ailments, with a lot of words and sensations locked up inside him. He could not remember the time he had not been shy, but from the moment he untwisted her that day on the street and caught the intimate woman-fright in her eyes, he had never been shy with her. He came to her lodging-house to live, and after a while they decided to get married. From that day life opened out. The firm with which he was connected branched out, and rewarded at last for years of hard work, he moved up, desk by desk, to a head clerkship. Practicing a thrilling economy, they saved enough to build a home, where regularities of living brought them health, propped them up with the idea of themselves, and wedged in between their days many darling concerns.

And now here was the boy going by every day, and many other gentle events, to precipitate her into speech and into pleasantly vague conceptions of things. For now, surrounded like a silk-worm, with the evidence of her own efficiency, with the thought of herself as woman and home-maker, with her husband and with her children — particularly with her eldest girl, who was rapidly acquiring what was to her mother an astonishing shapeliness of body, as well as all the fussy young arrogance that she herself had never possessed — surrounded with the bulwark of these things, she was getting a good deal out of existence. From morning until late night there sounded in her ears a good clamor of hours that refuted

all silences, however insistent; there were speech, railery, laughter and the radio.

Now then, thought the man at the window, if that boy should die — that big, husky fellow who is always flinging himself so red-bloodedly around the corner — if *he* should die, there would be a shock, real gloom and the celebration of a real sorrow.

Then the man at the window reached for his cane and knocked three great knocks on the floor that crashed through the vault of quiet above him and fell in a shower like breaking glass. When the nurse came in he asked her if it wasn't time for his medicine, although he knew quite well it wasn't. What he really wanted was to tell her what he had just thought. After he had told her, and she had assured him that it wasn't quite time for the medicine, she went out again, closing the door with a terrible precision, closing it as she had closed it a little while ago and as she would soon be closing it again, closing it as she would go on closing it until she closed it for the last time.

Well, anyway, thought the man at the window. And for a while he forgot the boy. A flock of great woolly clouds was going by. He watched them intently as they moved away with that vast, celestial importance peculiar to clouds. Slowly they careened, became shapeless with distance, hanging dubiously, it seemed, between the states of being and not being. As a child, he had always associated such clouds with the gates of Heaven; he could trace the impression now to a picture in an old book illustrating the portals of the Hereafter, with Saint Peter in hospitable, nebulous attendance. He turned his head to the door and his lips moved, but of course there was no one there to listen, so he turned back to the window.

Anyway, he reflected. Jerking himself away from the old association, his thought swung back to the boy, and

it seemed he was following him down the street. They were passing, one after another, all those reddish, stonish, eternal-looking buildings which he had thought a good deal about but had not seen for years, when the boy, who was just ahead, tottered and fell headlong. His death had been instantaneous. There was a rush, a quiet, and then a throng of horrified, weeping people, moving like slow music, gathered close about him. . . . Later there was his poor family. . . . Within the darkened, sweet-smelling house, it was as if nothing lived. These shadows that moved about, surely they were not of life — these wraith-like figures that moved through the hush of rooms and the cold of corridors, bringing him pale flowers, bringing him their thin selves to drop down beside the casket, bringing their weeping hands and hurt mouths to lay upon him. These had found death in grief. And over the house, over the town, like an inky cloud, pressed the realization of doom for the sake of one who had died well.

When, a little later, the nurse opened the door, the burning eyes of the man at the window caught at hers, and he rushed into speech to tell her that if that boy with the thundering walk should fall dead some day, there would be no one to think or say: What a blessing!

It had been a long time since anything had made her think of *that*; it took the boy with the wind in his ankles to do it. It was the boy, rushing down the street straight against her as she was walking home from work, who pushed aside the pavement, folded down the city, spread out the horizon, put the sunset colors back in the sky, swung the bridge over the river, set the alders and willows out in their rightful places along the bank and started the narrow stream to breathing again.

When she realized she had thought of it, she shut her mouth with a click and walked a little faster. In a min-

ute the boy streamed past her without being precipitated against her as it had seemed he must be, and she went on in company with a growing dislike of herself.

Well, what of it? It was a trivial incident — no more. If it had been just a little more, if it had portended anything at all, the fact that she had never forgotten wouldn't have been quite so ridiculous. Surely, tucked away among the big things in her later experience — her record at the office, the degree she had managed through night school, the occasional fulfilling flights of her mind — there were enough incidents to remember without falling back on this mere feather of a memory. Yet — what of it? She had thought of it, yes, but what of that? She hadn't kept it long in her mind, had she? She hadn't gone through with it again, rehearsing it like a drama, as she might once have done; hadn't seen him coming down the white of the road and onto the bridge while she approached from the opposite side, with that sensation of swimming, positively swimming, through the warm, watery air; hadn't met him there high above the stream, tarrying, leaning on the rail, as the light turned to ashes in the sky. She hadn't heard all over again every word he said, fitting little mannerisms and tricks of expression in between words where they belonged, with the care and pride of a jeweller working on something frail and exquisite. Most certainly she had not! She wasn't an utter fool. Life whips us all about a good deal, to be sure, playing queer pranks on us, making us things we do not want to be, plain when we should like to be lovely, poor when riches appeal to us, old when we might prefer to be young, but at least we don't have to be *fools*.

And as she moved on up the street, the sturdy heels of her sensible shoes stamped out the words on the pavement: At least we don't have to be fools, at least we don't have to be fools. The words acquired an amazingly pleasant little lilt. At least we don't have to be fools,

sang every tiny nail and every speck of polish and every strip of leather that went to make up her shoes. But after a while the strain began to jar on her like a popular song several months too old. Presently, as it uttered itself once more in her feet, she became argumentative.

Don't have to be fools! After all, isn't that something else we have to be? Isn't that what we have to be more than all else — utter fools, eighteen-karat idiots, so as to sort of keep things moving — for the sake of the species, in other words? The idea wasn't graceful. Her mother would have said it wasn't a nice idea.

Her eye swept the street. She saw people, people swaggering and smirking, people grave with a gravity worn like a borrowed coat or carried like a stolen umbrella, people acting like a lot of children trying to show off, each so ludicrously intent on coöperating with life, on offering themselves as material. Well, they were what they were made to be. Oh, it was very true: life had demanded more than all else, that they be fools. As they passed her, brushing by her, coming out of shop doors face to face with her, she started to feel annoyed with them; she prepared herself for a distaste a little like loathing; but suddenly her feeling changed, and with a rush of tenderness, she thought: Poor dear simpletons! — and she wished she might roll them all into one big, hurt, foolish child, so as to take them in her arms and weep over them.

Walking on, she began to feel very much better; she became almost light-hearted.

And there was one person who felt rather than saw the boy pass, a person who often walked up to the corner and stopped there a while, gazing uneasily up and down the street, as if looking for someone who never came. When the boy passed, something was stirred, there was an indefinite rhythm, a scent, perhaps a light sound, as when the wind moves through grain.

## ON A PARK BENCH

They sat on a bench in the park in the warmth of an early summer sunlight. They sat there for an hour watching people pass, and, as it was Sunday afternoon, many people passed up and down the gravel walk before them: lean people, stout people, young people, old people, people with babies, people with picnic baskets and shawls, people with cameras, people with books, people carrying nothing at all but their heavy, swinging hands. And all these people were much in earnest about nothing in particular and very intent on going nowhere.

They sat on the bench, and when they were not watching people going by, they were lifting slow eyes to the sky, looking here and there into the tops of trees, glancing at a great bush of syringa near them that lifted out of the quiet of the grass in a fire of fragrance and white and yellow motion. They talked quite a little. Often she would say something about a hat or a dress worn by some woman passing, or something about the sky being blue or a tree being awfully thick near the top, or that the syringa was pretty. And he would agree and probably call her attention to some other woman's apparel or to a robin that had crept up behind them and was standing on twig-like legs with its head cocked in eternal hope of a worm, adding as he always did whenever a robin was mentioned, that a robin reminded him of when he was a boy.

There were several other things they might have been doing. If they had stayed at home, she might have finished the ironing or done the mending, or even found time to cut out that new blouse of hers which she had been trying to get time to make ever since Christmas. Staying at home for him would have meant mowing the lawn or hosing out the basement, after which he would

have read the paper. In any case the clock on the mantel would have ticked and ticked and ticked.

It was pleasant sitting heavily on the bench with nothing to do but to watch people pass, and because it has been almost chilly in the house, it was nice to sit in the warmth of the sun. The sun was really offering them something more than warmth; it was laying on them little orgies of color, little insinuations of motion, little invitations to breathe; it was moving against their shoulders, sweeping down their arms and flooding across their wrists as if it would press back their fingers and put something in their empty hands. But they felt only the warmth, and feeling it, it occurred to them to remark every now and then that it was quite warm in the sun. And then the one or the other would add that it was not too warm, that it was just right. Yes, it was just right, the one or the other would agree, but still quite warm.

After a while they began to shuffle their feet a little, and their hands moved restlessly, unconsciously resentful, perhaps, of the sun's interference. They stopped repeating that the sky was blue, that the trees were thick, that the syringa was pretty; they stopped talking about the people going by and the clothes these people wore. And although the sun kept moving over them like yellow water, they stopped saying it was quite warm and began feeling it was warm, began feeling the warmth, began feeling the slow, beautiful warmth moving over them; but just about the time they began feeling it moving over them, becoming sleepy, they began to forget feeling it.

He nodded once or twice, and glancing up, she saw him and aroused herself with a sort of laugh and stood up. She said she thought they had wasted quite enough time and that they had better be going over where the animals were to hunt up the children. She really ought to have stayed home, she said, and finished up the ironing.

Fifteen minutes later, with the children in tow, they passed along the gravel walk in front of the bench where they had sat for an hour watching people pass. Somebody else was sitting there now. An old man, his hands clasped on his cane, looked up at them with very young eyes as they went by.

### THE RED HAT

The woman in the red hat kept close to the shop windows as she walked up the street. Sometimes someone got in her way a little, and although that bothered her, she showed not the faintest trace of annoyance; feeling the redness upon her head, she smiled, and each time, with a show of consideration, moved back to the window where she walked on with the brilliantly hatted reflection of herself. She was walking home to save carfare because she had just made the unexpected purchase of the red hat, which had cost thirty dollars instead of the four or five she had intended to invest in having the old black one done over.

But just fancy how the old black one would have looked with the straw cracked — you might say broken through — on the left side. Of course they had said the new ribbon would cover that, but imagine, unless they tacked it down so firmly that they tacked all the style out of it — imagine, if the wind blew. And even if the wind never blew, think of always knowing it was there.

It had been a long time since she had walked home, and she was enjoying it. This successfully apparelled person who walked along with her — that is, successfully apparelled so far as headgear was concerned — was an engaging companion. In the milliner's mirror she had had sad little puffs of flesh under each eye, and a curve that should have been under her cheekbone was lacking

and another that should not have been anywhere at all, was under her chin. All this was but the frailest suggestion of something that should not be, and the sense of depression that it had left with her vanished like a little cigarette smoke as she walked along with the more uncertain reflection of herself and the red hat.

The red hat was really a bargain at any price. The straw was of that lovely shiny braid which catches glint of the sun as if it would never let go of it; and squashed down over the crown and covering most of the brim, so that it hugged her hair and followed the line of her forehead, was a wreath-like mass of tiny red flowers. They were like — but what were they like and what were they not like? They were like yet unlike red lilacs, like and unlike red forget-me-nots, like and unlike red violets, and they had the subtlety of apple-blossoms and the rich drowsiness of the poppy. Truly, the hat was a bargain at any price.

How very pleasant it was to walk! Just the mere act of walking was enough; it was experience; it made you feel alive. And to walk up the street at this hour in the late afternoon when such crowds were on the street was to feel not only alive but a part — you might say an important part — of the big idea of life. Why had she not often walked home for the experience, and saved a car-ticket at the same time? How very easy it was to save, after all, if you kept track of the little things. Carfare added to carfare — how quickly it would mount up, how soon you would have thirty dollars or so, and without any effort except to put yourself in the way of the small economies. The household expenses, for instance — there was a field in itself for the little discoveries in economy. Butter, for one thing; avoid hot breads and there was a saving on butter. And instead of so much steak, have more stews and hashes and such things. A little care in the preparation of anything like that —

just the right seasoning or the addition of a chopped green pepper — made all the difference in the world. The trouble was, he was always so hungry at night, and he liked a good thick steak. But, then, he really ate more red meat than was good for him; he might get hardening of the arteries. No, when a little farther on she would come to the butcher shop, she would not indulge in the extravagance of a good porterhouse steak as she had intended; she would get hamburger steak and would probably open up some of the green-tomato pickle. He would like the green-tomato pickle.

She smiled at her amiable and dim and red-hatted self. Truly, the hat was a bargain at any price. She liked the way it closed about her head, she liked the way it pressed, fairly hugged, her hair like so much congealed sunshine. And everyone else seemed to like it, too; its red irradiation seemed to be a thing that reached out in waves to attract eyes. And not only did they like the hat, but it was as if they liked her for wearing it. Really, it took an experience of this kind to put you in touch with people, to teach you that life was just one big brotherhood after all. Here, elbow to elbow, you came into your own, precipitated into your identity, you might say, by contact with your kind. She had been keeping to herself too much; they both had. Imagine what a lot of good it would do him to mingle with people — parties and such things, where everybody talked and joked a lot and wore nice clothes and good-looking hats. Or if he would only do as she was doing, walk home now and then, he would not only benefit by the tonic spirit of the thing but it would do him good physically. Really, he was getting awfully stout. She remembered what a fine straight figure he had had when they were married; it had made him seem taller and, of course, much better looking. There was nothing like walking for reducing and putting the youth and the good looks back into you. Wouldn't you

think that he would have taken to walking home long ago? And think of the carfare he could have saved in all these years. It was the little things that counted; think, for instance, how much he could save by giving up smoking and that sort of thing.

She was passing a confectioner's shop. Glancing into the window, she saw beyond her pretty reflection a man and a woman seated at a little table eating ice-cream. The man was looking at the woman as if he were on the point of saying something to match the expression of his eyes. Just then, attracted by the passing shadow, he looked up at the woman in the red hat who caught the look and carried it up the street with her. She carried some of it in her eyes, but most of it she carried in the hugging pressure of the hat upon her head.

Walking on, she began to think about the woman, too, and of his relation to her. Maybe only a chance acquaintance, maybe she had been walking up the street just as she herself was, and he had been walking along, too. For a time he had watched her, attracted to her because she was good-looking or something, maybe only because of an evident good taste in dress and because she wore her things well. Very likely he had made up an excuse for speaking to her. How were such things done? Perhaps: Pardon, but hadn't he seen her before? Or it may have been all chance; maybe she had dropped something, and he had touched her arm: Hadn't she dropped her handkerchief? That was the way such things were done. An hour or so on the street, and how you learned things! How life's possibilities swept over you, making your blood feel like a river, letting you hear the undertones of things, teaching you that the trivial incidents, the small contacts of the street, you might say, put the pulse in all experience! Perhaps that was why it was so pleasant to walk — you felt so strongly the bigness of life's little possibilities. And more than ever she felt falling over

her the shadow of the red hat like rays of vermillion sunlight.

She came in sight of the butcher shop. Well, what was it to be for tonight? Of course if they had a good cut of porterhouse steak he would like that. But how silly, when it was saving on the little things that really counted. No, she would have some nice hamburger and would open up either some of the green-tomato pickle or the spiced pear. She was wondering whether he would like the green-tomato pickle or the spiced pear, when she glanced down and saw her bag was open. Goodness! had anything dropped out? No, there were her purse, her silver pencil and everything. But her handkerchief? Her handkerchief was not there.

She glanced back down the street. There, two stores away, she saw a speck of white on the pavement. She took one step toward it and stood still, conscious of nothing but a warmth on her head. Several people were coming up the street; one of these, a man, she watched as he approached the white speck two stores away. She saw him pause, saw him light a cigarette, saw him step over her handkerchief, and felt him walk briskly past her. Then, with the red shadows noticeably reflected on her face, she hurriedly retraced her steps. She refused to look at the wad of linen as she jammed the poor little grimy thing back into her bag. She felt as if it were something that had been hurt, and she didn't want to look at it just as she never wanted to see anybody's bruised finger. It was a handkerchief she had liked; it had a little wreath of fine cross-stitching in one corner, tiny pink and blue flowers and delicate green leaves. She remembered she had made it to give away for Christmas, but when it was finished it had appealed to her so much that she had had to keep it for herself. She had enjoyed making it; she had made most of it during long rainy afternoons in the bay-window, and once or twice

she had worked on it at night, though that had been hard on her eyes. She had always been glad she had kept it. She realized now that she was quite hot and upset at the idea of losing it.

Once in the butcher shop, awaiting her turn to be waited on, she found that the walk had tired her after all. And suddenly she thought of the old black hat which she had let them send home. It would be in a big new box and all swathed around with tissue-paper. If he should happen to get home first, and if the hat had been delivered and they had left it on the porch and he had carried it in, he might undo it and glance inside, wondering what it was. How surprised he would be to see the old black hat which she had taken down to have done over! He would decided that she had bought a new hat after all; he would think she had seen a bargain and snatched at it. A bargain would please him — marked down to five dollars and ninety-five cents, or something like that. He would never, never dream that she had bought a red hat and had paid thirty dollars for it.

It was her turn to be waited on. She said she wanted a good porterhouse steak a little thicker than usual.

#### BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Hazel Hall was born in St. Paul in 1886 and died in Portland May 11, 1924. Practically all her life was spent in the latter city. As a result of a fall or of an attack of scarlet fever, she was not able to walk after she was twelve years old. Her first book of poems, *Curtains*, was published in 1921, and her second volume, *Walkers*, in 1923. A third volume of poetry will be published in the near future. She began writing fiction only a short time before her death, using the pen-name "Hannah Bryant." The stories in this number are the first public witness of an authentic talent in that field,— a talent the exercise of which was so unhappily brief. The first story in this group, "A Boy Passes By," had been accepted by THE MIDLAND shortly before its author's death.

## BRIEF REVIEWS

*The Genius of Style*, by W. C. BROWNELL. (Scribner's, \$2.) My hearty respect for Mr. Brownell's little volume entitled *Criticism*, and for much of his other work, arouse an expectation which the present volume has disappointed. Mr. Brownell has written some two hundred pages about the problem of style without adding anything particularly illuminating or even suggestive to the existing literature of the subject. At the same time he has made his discussion the occasion for voicing a number of critical doctrines of a general nature, which necessarily are less impressive introduced in this way than when buttressed by the solid argument of his books dealing directly with criticism. When will someone deal thoroughly with this ancient problem, breaking up our vague and unsatisfactory blanket conception of style into its component parts, and defining, so far as possible, the limits and significance of each?

J. T. F.

*The Short Story's Mutations*, by FRANCES NEWMAN. (Huebsch, \$2.50.) A slow-witted fellow like myself should, obviously, be very cautious in dealing with the work of so eminently clever a person as Miss Newman. Certainly he should not go so far as to suggest his belief that the "scientific" doctrine of the short story, vaunted in the title of this book, is neither more scientific nor more sound than the scores of other theories at which Miss Newman justly scoffs. And manifestly it is foolhardy to record his conviction that the chief distinction of the book is its powerful demonstration of the fact that cleverness can become extremely tedious.

J. T. F.

*From the Hidden Way*, by JAMES BRANCH CABELL. (Maebride, \$2.50: reissue.) *Straws and Prayerbooks*, by JAMES BRANCH CABELL. (Maebride, \$2.50.) It is the first of these books which appeals to me most strongly. Poems the loveliness of which will induce a second, a sixth, a twentieth reading, are a bit rare in our day. And there are four such poems in *From the Hidden Way*, besides a score that are only less exquisite, and perhaps more diverting.

*Straws and Prayerbooks* is inevitably compared to *Beyond Life*. There is here the same comparative study of romantic literature, and the same generous praise of contemporary romantic writers. There is the same elaborate and not easily

refuted argument for Romance itself. There are the same by-plays of cogent fantasy, the same deft impalings of the awkward and unlovely in footnote and allusion. The whole process is one which I, as a writer seeking to use the methods of realism but already aware that I will forever be dubbed "romantic" by the more meticulous, must view with mixed emotions. . . . I must confess that I think *Straws and Prayerbooks* inferior to *Beyond Life*. It seems to me to move less vividly and gracefully, to grow at times wordy and inconsequential. I believe it is, in short, a less adroit, forceful, and salutary book. But it is infinitely more human. The last parts of it bring the man Cabell courteously and yet disconcertingly close to the discerning. I cannot read the final pages without tears. . . . We learn that Cabell has written the biography chiefly to divert himself. I remember one who spoke of an "obscure inner necessity". I wonder — and reflect, chiefly, that in such matters, words are largely idle and incomprehensible things. But I am glad when even half-idle words are beautiful and moving, as they are in *Straws and Prayerbooks*.

J. T. F.

*Thomas Chandler Haliburton ("Sam Slick")*, by V. L. O. CHITTICK. (Columbia Press, \$4.) Sam Slick, the Yankee clock peddler, is one of the important figures in the large gallery of wits of the American frontier. His creator was a Canadian judge who needed him in his political controversies, and therefore the Yankee was ready with his comment on Canadian affairs. But it is the Slick aphorisms of more general application in which we are interested. "Any man that understands horses," he says, "has a pretty considerable fair knowledge of women, for they are jist alike in temper, and require the identical same treatment. Incourage the timid ones, be gentle and steady with the fractious, and lather the sulky ones like blazes." Sam was "quite a character." He certainly knew his liquors, including "white-nose, apple-jack, stone wall, chain-lightning, railroad, hail-storm, ginsling talabogus, switchel-flip, gum-ticklers, phlem-cutters, juleps, skate-iron, cast-steel, cock-tail." And "many's the time," he declares, "I have danced 'Possum up a gum-tree' at a quilitin' frolic or a huskin' bee with a tumbler full of cider on my head and never spilt a drop; — I have upon my soul!" Sam is an own brother to Jack Downing and Birdofedom Sawin. — Professor Chittick's book is an example of the best kind of doctoral dissertation: it is competent,

entertaining, and important. The chapters on Canadian politics, though not greatly interesting to American readers, are necessary to an understanding of the more or less admirable Haliburton, and are by no means dull. The chapter on "Tall Tales of American Life" is an excellent one.

F. L. M.

*Conversations on Contemporary Drama*, by CLAYTON HAMILTON. (Macmillan, \$2.) Here is a book which is well named; a series of informal lectures delivered to students of Columbia University, it is in the best conversational tone. One may not agree with more than half of what the speaker says; yet one must always find his ideas stimulating and provocative. Nothing more need be expected from such a book, except that it be interesting,—and it is that.

F. L. M.

*The New Spoon River*, by EDGAR LEE MASTERS. (Boni and Liveright, \$2.50.) *The New Spoon River* is in every way less important than the *Spoon River Anthology* of 1915. It is not merely that this is an inferior book: it lacks the range of the earlier volume, particularly in the direction of the presentation of beauty and happiness. It is far less objectively true than the *Anthology*—far more an artificial medium for the projection of Masters' two or three fixed ideas. But its lack of importance is chiefly due to the fact that the world has changed since 1915, and that Masters has changed less than the world. The present volume lacks almost entirely the profound historical significance, both as to ideas and method, which distinguished the earlier volume. . . . Altogether, this is an undistinguished and insignificant piece of work. It is perhaps worthy of note that the earlier *Spoon River* was published serially in the comparatively obscure columns of *Reedy's Mirror* (of blessed memory!) and that the second *Spoon River* was blazoned on the remunerative pages of *Vanity Fair*.

J. T. F.

*There Came Two Women, A Drama in Four Acts*, by HERBERT QUICK. (Bobbs-Merrill.) Greatly as I admire some of Mr. Quick's work, I cannot but regret that he wrote this little book. Mr. Quick is no master of that difficult medium, blank verse; and it may be doubted whether the dramatic form is appropriate for this story, and even whether the story needed to be written. I am going to consider this a *lapsus calami*, and forget it.

F. L. M.

